

Chapter 45

Whoever Abuses Time has Derogated Allāh

Allāh, Most High, says,

“They say, ‘There is nothing but our existence in this world. We die and we live and nothing destroys us except for time.’ They have no knowledge of that, they are only conjecturing.”¹

The Ṣaḥīḥ records, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah, that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Allāh, Most High, says, ‘The son of Ādam derogates Me: he abuses time whereas I am time: I alternate the night and the day.’”²

Another narration has, “Do not abuse time for Allāh is time.”³

Issues:

1. The proscription of abusing time.
2. He called this derogating Allāh.
3. Consider carefully his saying, “Allāh is time.”
4. One could well be (viewed) an abuser even if he does not intend to do so in his heart.

Commentary

Allāh, Most High, says,

“They say, ‘There is nothing but our existence in this world. We die and we live and nothing destroys us except for time.’ They have no knowledge of that, they are only conjecturing.”

In his exegesis to this verse, al-ʿImad ibn Kathīr said,

Allāh, Most High, informs us about the disbelieving materialists (*dahriyyah*)⁴ and those polytheist Arabs who agree with them insofar as the resurrection is concerned. “***They say, ‘There is nothing but our existence in this world. We die and we live and nothing destroys us except time,’***” there is nothing save this abode in which one people pass away only to be replaced by another, there is no resurrection or judgement. This was the view of the polytheist Arabs who rejected the resurrection, and this was also professed by the religious philosophers: those who denied both a point of commencement and a return. The materialist philosophers who denied the existence of a creator and who believed that everything returns to its original point of commencement every thirty three thousand years [also held to this view]. They believed that this process has been happening ad-infinitum and as such obdurately denied what was known through both rational and textual media. This is why they said, “***nothing destroys us except time.***” Allāh, Most High, says about them “***They have no knowledge of that, they are only conjecturing,***” i.e. surmising and imagining.⁵

The Ṣaḥīḥ records, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah, that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Allāh, Most High, says, ‘The son of Ādam derogates Me: he abuses time whereas I am time: I alternate the night and the day.’”

The ḥadīth is recorded in the Two Ṣaḥīḥs, Abū Dāwūd, and Nasā'ī via the route of Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah, on the authority of Zuhri, on the authority of Sa'id ibn al-Musayyab, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, “Allāh, Most High, says, ‘The son of Ādam derogates Me: he abuses time whereas I am time: in My hand lies the affair and I alternate the night and the day.’”⁷

Another narration has, “Do not abuse time for I, and I alone am time.”⁸

Another narration has, “Let not the son of Ādam say, ‘O woe is time,’ for I, and I alone am time: I send forth the night and the day and were I to so wish, I could withhold both of them.”⁹

The author of *Sharḥu 'l-Sunnah* said (summarised),

This ḥadīth is agreed upon as being ṣaḥīḥ. It was recorded by both (Bukhārī and Muslim) via numerous routes through Ma'mar on the authority of Abū Hurayrah...The Arabs would routinely blame time, i.e. they would abuse it at the onset of trying times. This is because they would blame the calamity or difficulty that had befallen them on it, they would say, ‘The misfortune of time has afflicted him or time has destroyed him.’... Now, because they annexed the difficulty that had befallen them to time, they abused the actor, the cause. The ultimate end of that abuse would be Allāh, Mighty and Magnificent, since in reality He is the true actor, the true cause behind the occurrences they attributed to time. As such they were prohibited from abusing time.¹⁰

Ibn Jarīr records this ḥadīth via this route, but with an extremely odd wording. He said, ‘The people of *Jāhiliyyah* would say, “It is only the (passage of) day and night that destroys us, this is what destroys us, causes us to die, and gives us life.” So Allāh said in His Book, “***They say, ‘We die and we live and nothing destroys us except for time.’***” They would abuse time so Allāh, Mighty and Magnificent, said, “The son of Ādam derogates Me: he abuses time whereas I am time: in My hand lies the affair and I alternate the night and the day.”¹¹

A similar wording was also recorded by ibn Abī Ḥātim on the authority of Aḥmad ibn Maṣṣūr, on the authority of Surayj ibn al-Nu'mān, on the authority of ibn 'Uyaynah. Then he records from Yūnus, on the authority of ibn Wahb, on the authority of Zuhri, on the authority of Abū Salamah, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah who said that he heard the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ saying, “Allāh, Most High, says, ‘The son of Ādam abuses time whereas I am time: in My hand lies the day and the night.’” This was also recorded by the authors of the Ṣaḥīḥ and Nasā'ī via the route of Yūnus ibn Yazīd.

Muḥammad ibn Ishāq said, on the authority of al-'Alā' ibn 'Abdu'l-Raḥmān, on the authority of his father, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, “Allāh, Mighty and Magnificent, says, ‘I requested a loan from My servant but he did not grant it to Me. My servant abuses me, he says, “Confound time!” but I am time.’”¹²

Shāfi'ī, Abū 'Ubayd, and other Imāms said in commentary to his saying, “Do not abuse time for Allāh is time,”

In the times of *Jāhiliyyah*, when afflicted with hardship, tribulation, or disaster, the Arabs would say, ‘O woe is time!’ They would attach these events or acts to time and then abuse it; however, the true actor, or cause of these events is Allāh, Most High, so it is as if they have abused Him, Glorious is He. It is for this reason that they were prohibited from abusing time, i.e. when looking at it from this perspective, i.e. Allāh is the ‘time’ which they meant when attaching those events or

acts to it. This is the best explanation that has been given, and it is indeed what is meant. Allāh knows best.¹³

Ibn Ḥazm and other Zāhirīs were mistaken when they included ‘time’ as one of the Beautiful Names of Allāh, using this ḥadīth as their proof. The ḥadīth itself explains what is meant with the words (following that statement), “I alternate the night and the day,” and His alternation includes His causing to occur therein what people like and dislike.

The ḥadīth contains an additional wording which the author has not mentioned, “in My hand lies the affair.”¹⁴

Another narration has, “Do not abuse time for Allāh is time.”

This narration is explained in the ḥadīth, “I am time: in My hand lies the affair and I alternate the night and the day,” i.e. the good and bad that happens therein happens by the will of Allāh and His regulation. He, Most High, knows of it and it occurs for a wisdom. None shares with Him in this. Whatever He wills is and whatever He does not will is not. The obligation (upon the servant) when faced with both situations is to praise Him, make good his opinion of Him, Glorious is He, and to turn back to Him in penitence and repentance. Allāh, Most High, says,

“We tried them with good and evil so that hopefully they would return.”¹⁵

“We test you with both good and evil as a trial and you will be returned to Us.”¹⁶

Attaching the act to time and then abusing it is a routine occurrence, it can be seen in the poems of poets of mixed descent (*muwalladīn*)¹⁷ such as ibn al-Mu`tazz and Mutanabbī.¹⁸

Not included in this is to describe years as being hard and the likes as in the saying of Allāh, Most High,

“Then after that seven hard years will arrive.”¹⁹

One of the poets said,

The passage of nights is terrifying
Compacting and spreading life-spans
Short days, when beset with worry, are long
Long days, when filled with joy, are short

¹ *al-Jāthiyah* (45): 24

² Muslim #2246. Bukhārī #4826-7491 with the words, “Allāh, Most High, says, ‘The son of Ādam derogates Me: he abuses time whereas I am time: in My hand lies the affair and I alternate the night and the day.’”

³ Muslim #2246

⁴ *Dahriyyah*, from *dahr*, denoting a period of time and in this context denotes the space of time in which this material world is living, and as such the doctrine of materialism was named after it, *dahriyyah*. The doctrine has various manifestations and generally believes in the eternity of the world in the past and the future resulting in

the denial of resurrection and the concept of a Hereafter. Not all materialists deny the existence of a Creator, some argue that the world is eternal and also has a Creator.

⁵ Shaykh Sulaymān, *Taysīr al-`Azīz*, said, ‘If it asked, “How does this verse fit in with the subject matter since it is talking about the materialists amongst the polytheists?” The answer is that the subject matter and verse correlate in that whoever abuses time has taken aboard their practise at the time of abusing, even though he may not have shared with them in their belief.’

Ibn al-`Arabī, *al-Qabas* (in the margin of *al-Tamhīd*), vol. 23, pp. 379-380, said, ‘It was the practise of *Jāhiliyyah* to attribute acts, or causes, such as oft-recurring means (*asbāb*) or consecutive occurrences (*ḥawādith*) to others besides Allāh, Most High. When faced with pleasing events they would rejoice, but when faced with distasteful events they would turn their attentions to time and abuse it, attributing blame and harm to it. The Prophet ﷺ wished to purge their belief of this vile trait and to teach them that these actions that they hated or liked were not attributed to means, nor were they subservient to events, rather they were all to be adjoined to Allāh, Mighty and Magnificent, in the sense of decree and creation. To abuse the consequences and the effect is to abuse the cause.’

Qurṭubī, *Muḥim*, vol. 5, pg. 547, said, ‘There is no doubt about the disbelief of one who literally attributes these acts, or part of them, to time. As regards one who says such words on his tongue but does not hold this belief, he is not a disbeliever, however he has imitated the disbelievers and the people of *Jāhiliyyah* in his making such statements, and moreover he has done something proscribed by the messenger of Allāh ﷺ. Such a person must repent and ask Allāh, Most High, for forgiveness.’

⁶ Shaykh Sulaymān, *Taysīr al-`Azīz*, said, ‘The word derogate, *adhā*, in the language refers to evil and abhorrent matters whose importance is reduced or made light of or whose effect is weakened. This was mentioned by al-Khaṭṭābī and Shaykhu’l-Islām said, “It is as he said. This is not the same has harm, *ḍarar*, for Allāh has informed us that the servants cannot harm him, **“Do not let those who rush headlong into disbelief sadden you. They do not harm Allāh in any way.”** [*Āli `Imrān* (3): 176] Hence Allāh explains that the creation cannot harm him, but they can derogate Him when they abuse the changer of affairs.”*’ Ibn Ḥajr, *Fath*, vol. 13, pg. 572, said, ‘His saying, “*derogates Me*,” means that he attributes something unbecoming to Me.’

* Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Sārim al-Maslūl*, vol. 2, pp. 118-119

Ibn al-Fāris, *Mu`jam Maqāyīs al-Lughā*, said that the basic meaning of *adhā* was ‘something that you dislike and do not accept.’ `Ainī, *Umdat al-Qārī*, vol. 13, pg. 306, said, ‘Ṭībī said, “*adhā*’, derogation, is to convey something disliked to another be it in speech or deed, regardless of whether it has any effect or not. *Īdhā*’ of Allāh is a phrase referring to doing something that He dislikes and is not pleased with; the same applies to *īdhā*’ of the Messenger of Allāh.”’

⁷ Bukhārī #4826-7491 and Muslim #2246

Bukhārī #6181 and Muslim #2246 also record it with the words, “Allāh says, ‘The children of Ādam abuse time whereas I am time: in My hand lies the night and the day.’”

⁸ Muslim #2246

⁹ Muslim #2246

Bukhārī #6182 records the ḥadīth with the words, “Do not say, ‘Woe is time,’ for Allāh is time.”

¹⁰ Baghawī, *Sharḥu’l-Sunnah*, vol. 12, pp. 355-357

Shaykh Sulaymān, *Taysīr al-`Azīz*, said, ‘It is clear that the polytheists are of two categories. 1) Those who believed that time was the actor or cause and would curse it for this reason. These are the materialists. 2) Those who believed that the regulator of the affairs was Allāh Alone with no partners, yet they would abuse time due to

the difficulties and events occurring in its passage. They would ascribe those events to it by way of ascribing something to the place (in which it occurs), not because they believed that it was the actor or cause. The ḥadīth is explicit in proscribing the abusing of time unrestrictedly regardless if one believes that time is the actor or not.’

¹¹ Arna`ūt, *Tahqīq Musnad*, vol. 12, pg. 188 said, ‘Ṭabarī included this wording as part of the ḥadīth from the Messenger ﷺ whereas, in reality, they are the words of Sufyān.’

¹² Aḥmad #7988

It was ruled ṣaḥīḥ by Ibn Khuzaymah #2479 and Ḥākim #1526 with Dhahabī agreeing. The isnād was ruled ḥasan by Arna`ūt et. al.

Aḥmad #10438 also records the ḥadīth with the words, “Do not abuse time for Allāh, Mighty and Magnificent, said, ‘I am time, the days and nights belong to me, I repeat and renew them and cause them to decline and fade away, and I bring kings after kings.’” The ḥadīth is ṣaḥīḥ; ibn Ḥajr, *Fath*, vol. 10, pg. 565, said that the isnād was ṣaḥīḥ.

¹³ The paragraphs after the quote from Baghawī are the words of ibn Kathīr, vol. 12, pg. 363-364, in his commentary to the verse of *al-Jāthiyah*

Khaṭṭābī, *A`lām al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 3, pg. 1904, said, ‘The meaning is that “I am the owner of time and the regulator of the affairs that you attribute to time. So, when the son of Ādam abuses time because it is the actor, the cause, of these events, his abuse in reality is directed to Me because I am the actor, the cause. Time is just a measure, a vessel that I have appointed in which events occur.” When faced with times of hardship or some difficulty, it was the habit of the people of *Jāhiliyyah* to attribute this to time and then to abuse it. They would say, ‘Blast time! Perish time!’ and the likes.’

Ibn Khuzaymah, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, pg. 114, said, ‘The meaning of “*I am time*,” is that I bring about time and the change of day and night that occurs therein, bringing times of ease and hardship as I will. Some of the disbelievers believed that it was time that destroyed them and Allāh, Mighty and Magnificent, relates their belief in the words, “***and nothing destroys us except time.***” He then taught us that they have no knowledge of this and that they were only conjecturing; that their professed belief was nothing save speculation, “***They have no knowledge of that, they are only conjecturing.***” The Prophet ﷺ informed us that the one who curses that which destroys them is in fact cursing his Lord, Mighty and Magnificent. They would curse time thinking that it was time that destroyed them thereby cursing, in their view, their destroyer, but in reality it is Allāh who destroys them, not time; hence every disbeliever who would curse their destroyer was in fact cursing their Creator: their true destroyer, not time which is devoid of action and deed. Allāh is the creator of time.’

¹⁴ i.e. in the narration of Bukhārī, the narration of Muslim has the wording mentioned by the author, may Allāh have mercy on him.

¹⁵ *al-A`rāf* (7): 168

¹⁶ *al-Anbiyā`* (21): 35

¹⁷ The basic meaning of *muwallad* is a person of mixed ancestry, especially a descendant of an Arab and a non-Arab parent, who grew up among Arabs and was educated within the Arab-Islamic culture. In Islamic history *muwalladūn* designates in a broader sense non-Arab neo-Muslims or the descendants of converts. In the Muslim-ruled part of the Iberian Peninsula parts of the indigenous, until-then Christian population – of Ibero-Roman or Visigothic ancestry, particularly many noble families seeking to escape *dhimmi* status, – converted to Islam in the eighth and ninth centuries. In the tenth century a massive conversion took place, so that *muladies* comprised the majority of the population of Andalus by the century's end.

Through the cultural Arabisation of *muladies* and their increasing intermarriage with Berbers and Arabs, the distinctions between the different Muslim groups became increasingly blurred in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, so they merged into a more homogeneous group of *Andalusi Arabs* or Moors.

"Muladi" has been offered as one of the possible etymological origins of the still-current Spanish term "Mulatto", denoting a person of mixed European and non-European ancestry.

(Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muladi>)

¹⁸ How does this chapter correlate to the topic matter of the book? Shaykh Sulaymān, *Taysīr al-`Azīz*, said: ‘Ibn al-Qayyim said, “There are three heinous crimes (in cursing time):

1. Cursing something that does not deserve cursing. Time is a creation of Allāh subject to His control and subservient to His command. Therefore the one who abuses it is actually more deserving of censure and abuse!

2. Abusing it comprises *shirk* for he has abused time thinking that it brings about harm or benefit. Alongside this he thinks that it is oppressive in that it harms those who deserve grant, and grants to those who do not deserve it; it raises those who do not deserve it and prevents from those who do not deserve it. In the view of those who abuse it, it is one of the worst oppressors and the poems of these faithless tyrants abusing it are many. Many of the ignorant openly curse it and vilify it.

3. The abuse ensuing from them is directed at the one who does these acts, acts which if were performed in conformation to their desires would have corrupted the heavens and the earth. When things go their way, agreeing with their desires, they praise time and commend it. In reality, it is the Lord of time who grants and prevents, who raises and lowers, and who honours and disgraces, and time has no control over this at all. Therefore to abuse time is to abuse Allāh, Mighty and Magnificent, and this is why it is derogatory to Him, Most High.

Therefore the one who is cursing time is vacillating between two matters: either he is abusing Allāh or committing *shirk*. If he believes that time is an actor alongside Allāh, he is a *mushrik*, and if he believes that Allāh Alone is the one who does this, and he is abusing the one who has done this, he has abused Allāh, Most High.”*

* Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma`ād*, vol. 2, pp. 354-355

¹⁹ *Yūsūf* (12): 48